GM Gives Its Pickups A Much-Needed Makeover

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors is giving its big pickups a much-needed makeover.

The company is unveiling new versions of its top-selling Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra on Thursday. The 2014 models will go on sale by early spring or late summer.

The timing is good. The models roll into a market where truck sales are growing after a five-year slump. And GM's current trucks are looking dated, hurting sales. The current trucks, last revamped in 2007, are the oldest on the market and have fallen behind newer models from Ford and Chrysler.

The revamped Silverados and Sierras are aimed at putting GM back in front. They look similar to the old models, but are a little more aggressive and aerodynamic-looking. The company also says the trucks will have stronger, quieter cabs, and updated steering, suspensions and brakes.

GM is offering a choice of three revamped engines: a 262-horsepower, 4.3-liter V-6 that GM says can tow a substantial trailer; a 325-horsepower, 5.3-liter V-8 will get better mileage than the current model, which gets 22 mpg on the highway; and a 6.2-liter V-8 with 376 horsepower.

Gas mileage and pricing of the trucks was not released Thursday.

The trucks should hit the market at a good time. The economy is improving and pickup trucks are starting to sell again. The housing industry, which has a direct relationship to pickup sales, is strengthening and should be in even better shape by springtime when the weather gets nicer. Plus, trucks now on the roads are aging because people kept them through the recession. The average age of a pickup in the U.S. is now 10.4 years, GM said.

But GM is having a tough time selling its older trucks against Ford's F-150 and Chrysler's revamped Ram. Full-size pickup sales were down 8 percent last month as competitors saw increases. At the end of November, GM had enough trucks on dealer lots to supply them for 139 days of sales. Automakers consider a 60-day supply of vehicles to be optimal.

The company said that it didn't offer big deals last month, but that is changing in December as it tries to clear out the growing inventory.

The GMC and Chevy trucks, which are essentially the same vehicle, also will get six-speed automatic transmissions on all models, which should improve gas mileage. Some six cylinder models now have older four-speed transmissions that aren't as efficient.

All three new engines have efficient direct fuel injection, and GM says they can switch seamlessly to run on only four cylinders to use less gas. The engines will have more torque and power than the older models.

"Chevrolet is committed to giving truck customers the most refined, best-engineered pickups on the market," GM North America President Mark Reuss said in a statement.

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